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WOMEN ARE SYMBOL OF DURGA, MUST BE RESPECTED: PM MODI

Invoking Goddess Durga, the Prime Minister on Thursday reaffirmed his govt's commitment to women's empowerment

WITH AN EYE ON BENGAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

Addressing the people of West Bengal at the start of Durga puja, Modi said the Goddess is also worshipped as a daughter in the state, and emphasised that women must be respected. In his address, ahead of next year's Assembly elections, Modi also highlighted the Centre's various schemes for the state and the initiatives taken for women empowerment

LOW FOOTFALLS AT PUJA PANDALS

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, Kolkata's streets were bereft of the crowds of revellers normally seen on Mahasathi, which marks the beginning of the five-day Durga puja festivities | P10
In many big-ticket pandals, only a handful of organisers and locals were allowed due to restrictions imposed by Calcutta HC

78,000

POLLING BOOTHS ACROSS WEST BENGAL TELEVIEWED THE PM'S ADDRESS

Whenever available, the doses will be given to all states at a nominal cost. It's up to the chief ministers to decide how it will be administered, as healthcare is a state subject, says BJP

POLITICS OF VACCINE

Outrage as Bihar BJP plays the free shot for all card to keep mandate

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi/Patna

IN what was read as the politics of vaccine, the BJP's manifesto in Bihar promised to provide free Covid-19 shots to all people in the state if it retains power in the forthcoming Assembly elections. The party perhaps saw it as a trump card, as the universal free vaccine in the state was the first promise on its poll manifesto released by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

"As soon as the vaccine is available for production at a mass scale, every person in Bihar will get free vaccination. This is the first promise mentioned in our poll manifesto," she emphasised, adding: "Bihar is a politically sensitive state. Here, people cannot be fobbed off with empty promises."

Amid a barrage of criticism, the BJP sought to justify the announcement saying the vaccine will be made available at a nominal cost and it's up to the state governments to decide on providing it to the people free of cost since health is a state subject.

In a tweet dripping with sarcasm, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said: "Government just an-

nounced India's Covid access strategy. Kindly refer to the state-wise election schedule to know when you will get it, along with a hoard of false promises."

RJD's chief ministerial candidate Tejashwi Yadav hit out at the BJP for playing politics in the time of a pandemic by asking the people to vote for the vaccine. Access to a vaccine is the fundamental right of every citizen of India and making it a vote issue is electoral blackmail, Yadav said.

Leaders from other non-NDA parties also lashed out at the "blatant populism" and accused the BJP of exploiting Covid-19 fears for electoral mileage.

The BJP defended its announcement with party general secretary Bhupender Yadav saying the promise has been made as part of its public policy. The BJP's IT department head Amit Malviya said the Centre will provide the vaccine to all states at a nominal cost. "It will be up to the state governments to decide the distribution of the vaccines."

Meanwhile, activist Saket Gokhale filed a complaint with the Election Commission, saying the announcement violated the model code of conduct. P10



Not in sync with govt policy on vaccine prioritisation

\$7 bn set aside for vaccine

A Bloomberg report quoting unnamed sources said the Centre has already set aside about \$7 billion for Covid vaccination across the country. Each person needs two injections, with each shot costing \$2. The estimated cost per person is \$6-7, the report said

SUMI SUKANYA DUTTA @ New Delhi

THE promise of a free Covid-19 vaccine for every individual in Bihar in the BJP's poll manifesto is not in line with the Centre's own stated vaccine policy so far. Top functionaries of the government, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan had thus far said once the vaccine is available, it will be prioritised and be given to the most vulnerable groups first.

The National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration has already recommended a serosurvey-assisted vaccine policy, which means leaving out those with antibodies. The group has chalked out a plan to make the vaccine available to 30-40 crore people in the first phase, covering healthcare workers, front-line workers, the elderly and those with co-morbidities. Earlier this month, Vardhan had said the government is hoping and planning to receive and utilise 400 to 500 million doses, covering approximately 25 crore people, by July 2021.

Experts pointed out that vaccines should not be a poll issue. "I think vaccines should be free for everyone and part of universal health coverage," said Dr Gagan-deep Kang, a senior medical scientist. "For SARS-COV2 vaccines, since supply will be limited, they should be provided to those in highest need of protection using an open transparent allocation strategy."

US weighs crackdown on B-1 visas for H-1B jobs

India restores all existing visas

The Centre on Thursday decided to restore all the existing Indian visas suspended due to the coronavirus pandemic. The Home ministry announced it's giving permission to all Overseas Citizen of India and Person of Indian Origin card holders and all other foreign nationals to visit India for any purpose except on a tourist visa, electronic visa and medical visa

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

THE US State Department on Thursday proposed to halt the issuing of temporary business visas (B-1) for H-1B specialty occupation.

If implemented, the proposed plan could affect thousands of Indian IT workers and their employers. The temporary B-1 visa allowed IT companies to send professionals to the US for a short stay to complete on-site work.

"The proposal, if finalised, will eliminate any misconception that the B-1, in lieu of H policy, provides an alternative avenue for foreign professionals to enter the US for skilled labour," the State Department said in a statement.

It noted that issuing of temporary business visas "potentially encourages the workers

and their employers, to circumvent the restrictions and requirements relating to the H non-immigrant classification, established by the US Congress to protect American workers."

"The resulting transparency would reduce the impact on the US workforce of aliens performing activities in a specialty occupation without the procedural protections attendant to the H-1B classification," the State Department added.

Last December, the California attorney general announced a settlement with Infosys in a lawsuit that involved allegations of 500 of its employees working in the US on B-1 visa rather than the H-1B visa.

The proposal comes just two weeks ahead of the presidential election in the US with President Donald Trump eager to present himself as the protector of American jobs.

KARNATAKA HC FAVOURS DEATH FOR GANG RAPE

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE Karnataka High Court has recommended amending provisions of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) to include capital punishment for gang rape in addition to the existing provisions of life imprisonment with fine. The high court made the suggestion keeping in mind women's safety and to curb the menace of this crime in society at large.

Death penalty already exists for gang rape-cum-murder, as in the Nirbhaya case, but is not yet applicable for cases of gang rape in which there has been no death.

A division bench of Justices B Veerappa and K Natarajan made this recommendation to the Legislature/Central Government for further amendments to provisions of IPC Section 376D which deal with gang rape, while upholding the trial court's order sentencing seven accused to life imprisonment for the gang rape of a law student on the Jnana Bharathi campus in Bengaluru in October 2012.

Section 376D of the Indian Penal Code describes gang rape and the penalties it attracts as "where a woman is raped by one or more persons constituting a group, or acting in furtherance of a common intention, each of those persons shall be deemed to have committed the offence of rape and shall be punished with rigorous imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than 20 years, but which may extend to life, which shall mean imprisonment for the remainder of that person's natural life, and with fine..."

The court appreciated the victim for her courage during the legal battle, and pointed out that gang rape was much worse than murder. P7

CORVETTE INDIGENOUS STEALTH SHIP COMMISSIONED

INS Kavaratti is a combat-ready platform capable of "detecting and prosecuting" submarines, it was built under Project 28 (Kamorta class)

Govt to issue fresh ordinance on land reforms

BANSY KALAPPA @ Bengaluru

THE State Government has decided to go in for an ordinance for the second time on bringing amendments to the Land Reforms Act. The amendment bill had got stuck in the Upper House in the recently concluded legislative session.

The B S Yediyurappa cabinet, which met on Thursday, also gave its nod for Bengaluru's first power generation project from solid waste. Wayste, a French power company, has been given permission to set up a power generation plant in Chikkanagamangala near Electronics City. The company will use about 500 tons of solid waste daily to generate power.

With the state witnessing multiple cases of investors being defrauded — like the IMA case, Kanya, Sri Guru Raghavendra Co-operative Bank — the cabinet has decided to ban all unrestricted deposit schemes. P4

BSY writes to PM for ₹10k cr special aid

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

A day after conducting an aerial survey of the flood-affected districts in North Karnataka, Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa on Thursday termed the situation this year as more severe than previous years.

Pointing out that the cumulative loss incurred by the state due to three back-to-back rain and floods this year alone was about Rs 21,609 crore, Yediyurappa has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, seeking special assistance of Rs 10,000 crore.

"Considering this dire situation, I seek your kind consideration to provide a special assistance package of Rs 10,000 crore for Karnataka to handle the relief and rehabilitation measures for the families, farmers and areas affected by the three spells of extreme rainfall and floods in August, September and October 2020," the CM stated in his letter to the PM on October 17, a day after the PM spoke to him,



A road in Afzalpur taluk of Kalaburgi district was flooded in the recent rain

extending all support. Appreciating the PM's concern, which, he said, has given the much-needed confidence to the flood af-

fectured farmers and people of the state, the letter highlights the devastation caused by floods this year.

"The state in the first spell of extreme rainfall and flood in August up to September 15, suffered an estimated loss of Rs 9,441 crore. In the second spell of devastating rainfall and flood during the second fortnight of September 2020, the estimated damage is around Rs 5,668 crore. In the current third spell of heavy rainfall and extensive flooding, which started on October 10, the initial rough estimate of damage and loss is about Rs 6,500 crore," the letter states. P4

State woos domestic firms, showcases infrastructure

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

CHIEF Minister B S Yediyurappa on Thursday held talks with industry captains and detailed opportunities in IT, ITES services, machine tooling, manufacturing, aerospace, biotechnology and engineering design. The CM said Karnataka has attracted investment worth Rs 1.38 lakh crore, the highest in the country which would create 70,000 direct employment in the State.

Speaking at the 7th (virtual meet) Public Affairs Forum of India (PAFI) National Forum 2020, Yediyurappa said Karnataka is currently ranked second in terms of FDI investments for the period ending June 2020.

In separate meetings with Dalmia Group and Bharti Enterprises, the CM invited them to invest in Karnataka. The government is working to ensure that the lives and livelihood of citizens are protected and the investment climate

of the state remains strong, he said, and added that they look forward to working with Bharti Enterprises to support its growth opportunities in the state.

He also said measures were taken to make land procurement and labour compliances easier. Government has ensured that any approved project can start the next day without waiting for any downstream approvals by suitable amendments to Karnataka Industrial (Facilitation) Act, he said.

Rakesh Bharti Mittal, vice chairman, Bharti Enterprises, said they were interested in 5 (G) equipment manufacturing and also setting up telecom manufacturing components in Karnataka. He elaborated on their telecom and electronics network in Karnataka and also spoke about their involvement in providing vocational training and Quality Support Programme in Karnataka and in government schools of Ramanagara. P4

WITH THIS ISSUE

CITY'S BEST WEEKEND GUIDE
INDULGE

32 PAGES, INCLUDING 16 OF INDULGE (TABLOID)

EXPRESS READ

33 Indians held hostage in Somalia

New Delhi: The Indian High Commission in Kenya said on Thursday that it is in touch with the Somali government to rescue 33 Indian labourers kept hostage by a company in Mogadishu. They have been held by the company for the past eight months. "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Somalia has assured that arrangements will be made for these people to visit India soon," the Commission tweeted.

TODAY'S IPL MATCH

MUMBAI vs CHENNAI

The Super Kings are facing an early exit for the first time in IPL history. They need to win their remaining four matches to give themselves a mathematical chance of qualifying for play-offs. In a must-win match, they face defending champs Mumbai Indians, who are currently third in the table with 12 points.

ODDS: MUMBAI 5/8 | CHENNAI 11/8
LIVE: STAR SPORTS1/HOTSTAR @ 7.30PM

SWINGING NUMBERS

After Centre's rap, state govt ramps up RT-PCR testing

BANSY KALAPPA @ Bengaluru

WITH Karnataka reporting fewer Covid-19 positive cases over the recent past, as it was conducting more of Rapid Antigen Tests (RAT), the Union Health Ministry, which took note of it, has shot off a stern letter to the State Government a few days ago asking it to ramp up RT-PCR testing. Acting on it, the state has now increased the number of RT-PCR tests.

Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa told TNIE on Thursday, "I have asked the district au-

thorities and health officials to increase RT-PCR testing, as against Rapid Antigen Tests, at a meeting held a few days ago. We are doing our best and we will further increase the number of RT-PCR tests in the coming days."

The state reported 10,000-odd new Covid-19 positive cases daily in the first two weeks of October, but the numbers dipped suddenly. On October 19, the number of new cases was just over 5,000 and on October 20, it was 6,297. On October 21, there were 5,872 new cases while on

Thursday, the state added 5,778 cases. The number of tests during this period has consistently been over one lakh of which the proportion of RAT tests was higher.

Additional Chief Secretary, Health and Family Welfare Department, Jawaid Akhtar on Thursday confirmed to TNIE that the number of RT-PCR tests has gone up now. On Wednesday, 91,000 tests were conducted while on Thursday, 86,501 samples were tested by RT-PCR method.

CONTINUED ON: P1